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SHALL OUR CIVILIZATION BE PRESERVED ?

IN a previous article we considered the question whether our civilization is perishable or not, and certain causes were pointed out which, it was thought, might lead to its destruction. These were stated to be of various orders : physical causes, moral causes, and causes compounded of the two ; of which some were constantly operative, some newly arisen, and some threatening to arise in the future. Among the physical causes was mentioned the recurrence of an age of ice, regarded by scientists as sure to take place in a few thousand years, the effect of which would necessarily be utterly to destroy all living things and all the ordinary memorials of past civilization, such as books, monuments, and the like. Among the moral causes considered were an impure literature, resulting from and creating a perversion of the moral sense ; and false reasoning upon religion ; upon morals ; upon the nature and treatment of crime ; upon the reciprocal rights of capital and labor ; upon the relation of physical force to political sovereignty, and so upon the foundation of the right to govern. Of the mixed causes but a single one was hinted at,—the employment of means to prevent the increase of families, resulting from a perverted view of the marital relations and duties. The opinion was expressed that by the operation of these causes, or some of them, and of others similar to them, our civilization might, and by the operation of the one first mentioned probably would, be destroyed. As such a discussion, if ending there, would be comparatively unfruitful, our purpose is now to inquire what can be done to guard our civilization from the operation of such of these, and other like causes, as in their nature are preventable.

Beginning with the physical causes, it is, of course, not imagined that they can be prevented. The most that could be done would be to protect the fruits of civilization in a

measure from complete destruction by their operation. As any scheme for effecting this must seem visionary, we shall present the one we have in mind in outline only, and pass on to the consideration of the preventable causes. We have seen that the written memorials of our civilization are impressed only upon paper, destructible both by fire and water. If it be desirable that part or all of the treasures of that civilization should be preserved in such a form that, after the termination of a future glacial epoch, the miserable remnant, if any, of the inhabitants of the earth might avail themselves of them, could this be done? Unquestionably it might be done, and happily the history of antiquarian research has within the present century brought to our knowledge the means by which it might be effected. Two or three facts in this relation are of extreme interest. By the aid of the Rosetta stone, Champollion and his successors in Egyptian archæology have been enabled to decipher the hieroglyphics engraved by the early kings of Egypt upon their temple walls and monuments. These inscriptions were in different languages or systems of writing, which those savants suspected to be translations of each other. Finding in the Greek rendering of some of the words a key, they verified this suspicion by unlocking the mystery of them all. The same miracle of acuteness and learning was afterward repeated in translating inscriptions in three languages, the Assyrian, Median, and Persian, found engraved, in the cuneiform character, upon a rock fifteen hundred feet in height, at Behistun, in Kurdistan. By the aid of these two monuments, the history of many of the oldest and greatest empires that ever existed, written in characters which before had been unintelligible, were made familiar to the learned world. One circumstance shows the value of the discovery made at Behistun: Some thirty years ago, Mr. Layard opened a mound in the neighborhood of the ancient city of Nineveh, and found buried in it an immense number of cylinders of baked clay, in a perfect state of preservation, which were covered with inscriptions in the cuneiform character. These cylinders, when their contents were translated, turned out to be the royal library of the great Assyrian king Sennacherib. It is important to observe that as these cylinders had lain under a desert sand-heap for about twenty-seven hundred years, and were still as fresh as when first burned, so they would probably have lain there five or ten times as long, without

injury, had they been left undisturbed. One further fact: Six thousand years ago there were erected the celebrated pyramids of Ghizeh, in Egypt; structures whose immensity is proverbial, and yet whose condition has remained unchanged by time or human ravage, save that the thin external layer of polished stone has been removed,—a fate from which the immense mass of the remaining materials will always effectually preserve them. Certainly, so long as civilization should prevail in Egypt their destruction would not be permitted; and if barbarism should supervene, no use would be found for them, even if the means existed of breaking up and removing them.

From these facts we infer that, by employing substantially the same means, the rich and powerful nations of the earth might preserve the best part of the treasures of their civilization,—the outlines of their history, of their arts and sciences, and of their religion,—and thus tide it over a period of calamity and darkness until the return of a better day. By engraving upon the inner walls of pyramids, or upon the scarp faces of mountains, inscriptions in many languages, carefully leaving a key in the use of natural objects as equivalents of the names of things, the message of the nineteenth to the thirtieth or the fortieth century might be surely and accurately delivered. Doubtless, to insure this result, it would be necessary to select for these repositories the best places and the least destructible material. The former would be mountain-tops or immense deserts where burial mounds or other erections would attract attention. At the same time, of any structures erected the material and mode of construction should be such as not to excite the cupidity of savage races, and as easily to satisfy an aroused curiosity as to their contents. To this end, stone or brick would be the material used. Further than this, we shall not stop now to develop the scheme, but after answering one or two objections to it, pass on. It may be asked, of what benefit would the amplest possible traces of our civilization be to uncivilized races of men, caring for none of those things; or even to races already so far redeemed to civilization as to have an intelligent curiosity about them, and sufficient learning and ingenuity to decipher them? The answer is, to races wholly uncivilized there would possibly be no benefit at all; but when their descendants should have advanced to a certain

point in culture and refinement, the benefit would be very great; it would be the same that has followed in our day from the translation of the inscriptions of ancient Assyria and Egypt: the correction of errors current as to the early history of mankind and, above all, the illustrating and widening of the scope of our sacred writings, the basis of our creeds. Here the benefit to us has been beyond computation, since the new light shed upon the past has broken many of the fetters of the old theology. And if it be further asked, how would it benefit the present to attempt to send its message to the distant future, the answer would be, it would benefit the present by compelling it to choose out of the chaotic *farrago* of arts, beliefs, knowledges, that which its best wisdom should pronounce to be worthy of preservation. It would thus simmer down and clarify to its own apprehension the riches of its civilization, and, as it were, under the solemnities of its death-bed, transmit what it valued of its treasures, together with its last counsels, to its posterity. How, in such a quest, most of our systems of philosophy, our social theories, and our theologies would fare, we shall not stop to inquire.

With respect to the moral and other causes referred to, what can be done to avert the evil consequences threatened by them? In addressing one's self to this question, there is a twofold danger: on one hand, the danger when attempting to enunciate general principles of lapsing into mere commonplace admonition and exhortation; and, on the other, that of giving too great prominence to some pet instrumentality, as the school or the church; thus substantially imitating the rules of art criticism followed by the charlatan in the "Vicar of Wakefield," who depended for his success as a critic of art upon a strict adherence to two rules: "the one, always to observe that the picture might have been better if the artist had taken more pains; and the other, to praise the works of Pietro Perugino." No array of hortatory maxims, or of general principles, and no civilizing agency, can alone be relied upon as equal to the task of saving civilization. For that there must be invoked all influences that promise to be effective, and the menacing causes must, in general, be counteracted by agencies that are cognate, moral by moral, physical by physical. The exception would be where the cause should be moral, but so intrenched in institutions or established interests

as to be inaccessible to counter influences merely moral. There, more positive or even material agencies would need to be employed.

Of the things necessary to be done to save our civilization, the first and most important is to cause a complete change of attitude on the part of society toward wrong-doing. What is now the attitude maintained? It is one either of indifference, toleration, or connivance, or one suggestive of paralysis of the power of indignation, and of every faculty needed for the repression of crime. Toward the criminal the attitude of the public is that of weak pity, not unmingled with admiration. The criminal is an unfortunate man, to save whom from punishment seems to be the chief end of the law. Look for a moment at his trial in a court of justice. The jury, carefully selected for their ignorance, are made judges of both law and fact; to convict, they must be unanimous; if they have a reasonable doubt of guilt, they must acquit; they are themselves to determine what is a reasonable doubt; and, to crown all, they are instructed that it is better that ten guilty men should escape than that one innocent man should be punished. These rules and maxims, devised centuries ago by merciful judges, then met the ends of justice, since, as the laws were, as against the crown officers seeking to convict, a person accused had no chance of acquittal, for he was allowed neither counsel nor witnesses; but now they operate to screen the guilty from punishment, save in the few cases where there is a general cry for vengeance against some atrocious offender. The maxim about the ten guilty men is pressed upon juries by every felon's lawyer as the great safeguard of private rights. In truth, however, the interests of justice would be best subserved by making it read: "It is better that ten innocent men should suffer than that one guilty man should escape." Were that declared to be the policy of the law, juries would be made to feel, not that the innocent were less deserving than before of acquittal, but that the guilty were a hundred times more deserving of conviction and punishment; and the results would be most salutary. In not one case in a million could an innocent man suffer; and hardly one in a thousand of the guilty, instead of three out of four, as now, would escape. How necessary such a change of attitude is, may be seen from the constant recurrence of voluntary movements of private citizens intended to supply the defects of the law. Because great criminals gen-

erally escape punishment, lynching parties are of weekly occurrence in our country. Citizens' Associations have been found necessary to secure the execution of our municipal laws. From the announcements constantly appearing in the public journals, that from such a day laws, long in force but left unexecuted, would be rigidly enforced, one might infer that the duty of an executive officer is to cause the laws to be executed when he pleases to do so, or not at all if such be his will.

A like paralysis of administrative energies is manifested by all the agencies of our governments, resulting either from the weak sentimentalism of the public in reference to its criminals, or from fear of the political influence wielded by them and their abettors. So far has this evil pervaded our system, that government by the people is fast losing the excellences that were thought to characterize it. This perverted sentiment shows itself in everything that relates to the personal liberty of the citizen. While the right to personal liberty is a sacred one where it really exists, it does not exist at all times or in respect to all men. Out of a weak regard for personal liberty, the hand of the law is often stayed where the direct result is the sacrifice of the public good,—as in regard to the compulsory education of the young. It was the opinion of John Stuart Mill that the extreme socialistic doctrines of his time, though threatening disaster to the peace of society, tended to good, since they must compel the higher classes to save themselves by educating the lower. And yet the power of the Government to arrest a youth deserted by his parents, and preparing to enter upon a career of crime, with a view to teach him a useful trade and the rudiments of an education, has been strenuously denied. To those who think thus, the right of the state to make a good citizen of one against his will begins only when he has become a bad one, and all its efforts may prove nugatory. That the change of attitude desired may involve a general tightening of the restraints of law, and justify its enemies in characterizing it as a "new toryism," as being a relapse from "industrialism" to "militancy," may be true, as Mr. Herbert Spencer contends; but that fact by no means settles the question of its necessity. If modern liberalism, with its *régime* of contract and the resulting universal license, is to land us in anarchy, then welcome the return of militancy, or of toryism, with its *régime* of *status*, for the sake of its accompanying social restraints.

One of the causes which, it was supposed, might tend to the destruction of our civilization, is such a radical perversion of the reasoning faculty itself, that its verdicts would not correspond to the truth of things; and the supposition was made that a sect should maintain that the end justifies the means and, accordingly, that homicide, even of the innocent, though generally a crime, becomes praiseworthy when deemed necessary to the propagation of the tenets of the sect. What could be done with such teaching as that? Assuming that the teaching would be conducted in secret, or that, if public, the old prejudice in favor of freedom of speech and of the press would prevent its suppression by law, recourse could only be had to measures tending to counteract the evil consequences. To this end, two things might be done: one, to compel the education of the young and to direct it, in order to protect them from the perverting influences of such instruction; and the other, to refute the false reasoning. Of the two, the former would be the more effective, since to be of much avail refutation must reach the minds sought to be influenced by it. The "Provincial Letters" of Pascal in vain refuted, as is generally thought, his Jesuit adversaries. Those letters have been read mainly by Protestants, and if they have prevented the lapse of these to Rome, they have not diminished materially the number of Rome's adherents. It is a dangerous fallacy that "error is powerless for harm when truth is left free to combat it." There must be a combat, and for that, truth must not only be free to advance, but it must advance; and it must be able to strike the enemy in his strongholds. This could be done, in the case supposed, only where society had enabled it to reach the young by compelling them to receive the education it should itself prescribe.

Another cause supposed was the prevalence of an immoral literature. The question what to do with such a literature is not free from difficulty, save, perhaps, as to its grosser forms. These, with their pictorial aggravations, should be relentlessly ferreted out and destroyed. It is amazing that a civilized community should permit in the mails, on the book-stalls, in the hands of its youth, openly, the shameless profanations of the printer's art which are so common amongst us. This is a new danger, which the abundance of money, the cheapness of printed books and papers, and the universality of the reading habit have brought upon us, and which has become extremely pressing

while our law-makers have been asleep. Such literature should be dealt with after a new method; it should be treated as we treat venomous serpents; every man's hand should be against it for its extirpation, and its authors and venders should be punished. As for the more subtle, but seemingly less harmful forms, while something might be done by forbidding their importation, by declaring them not the subject of legal contract, and by prohibiting their sale to minors of either sex, still more could be effected by a judicious censorship which should forbid the publication of matter not fit to be printed because of its immorality,—a prudential measure, the employment of which the frenzy for freedom to do whatever one pleases has too long, perhaps, discouraged amongst us.

The evil could be cured, however, only by cultivating a taste for better literature, through the multiplication of library facilities, and by a more pointed religious instruction, accompanied by a vigorous campaign against the production and the sale of the noxious matter, like that which is suppressing the sale of intoxicating liquors. And here, also, a change of attitude is much needed. Hitherto, given a work of artistic genius, no matter how filthy its subject or its treatment, the blind devotees of culture have made haste to stamp it as sacred, and have refused to let it die. Words are weak to express the absurdity of such a worship of impurity under the guise of art. No expense or effort is too great on the part of governments to prevent the approach of a plague which kills its thousands, while they permit the ravages of a moral pestilence which is certain to corrupt the spiritual natures of the millions, old and young, who come under its influence.

Let a true word be spoken of much of the nude art that fills our galleries. It is of two grades. The first is that of which the nudity is the most conspicuous feature,—naked figures, very clearly female and of the human species, but without a touch of imaginative beauty or of spiritual elevation. The second consists of really artistic presentations of that which, uninfluenced by a vicious custom, modesty could never consent to reveal, of which the effect, nevertheless, as of all true art, is elevating and inspiring. But as the higher forms of art are conditioned by the lower, from which they gradually emerge, is it probable that the total effect of nude art production is so far good that it ought to be encouraged, unless a careful discrim-

ination be made of the higher from the lower, and only the former be exhibited?

Another widely operating cause grows out of the relations of capital and labor. The conflict between these great forces has developed in our day questions and conditions, industrial, social, and political, of extreme importance and delicacy. How they are to be met and treated can be best shown by considering two of the many phases assumed by the warring parties. The first of these may be characterized as honest labor *versus* honest capital; and the second, as the associate guild of assassins — the Nihilist and the dynamitard — *versus* honest labor and capital.

How shall society deal with these foes, not only at war with each other, but advancing apparently for a deadly assault upon her? Here again we must repeat that the attitude of society itself, especially toward the first, the warring elements of which are credited by us with honesty of purpose, is to the last degree important. Society must be quick to concede whatever is reasonable and just in the demands, and to sympathize with the wrongs of each. The nobility of labor, the vulgarity of idleness, and the meanness and wickedness of grinding the faces of the poor, must be felt and taught. Let society emphasize these truths: that human nature receives the stamp it bears of nobleness, not from the *fainéant* rich, but from the laboring poor, who constitute the mass of mankind; that to earn his bread by the sweat of his face is at once the destiny and the unspeakable blessing of man; and that infinite harm has been done by the old wives' fable that labor was laid upon him as a curse. Thus estimating the parties, what can society do to arrest the dangers threatened from their conflicts? As the most promising field for its effort is the young, whom it has both the power and the right to mold, education should be compulsory, and it should be specially adapted to meet the social conditions of the time. The child should be taught that there is no more real antagonism between labor and capital than between the boy and the man; that labor is capital in a rudimentary stage; that seeking to become capital, it is constantly realizing its aim by simple growth. Let labor see that the measure meted out by itself to capital to-day will be measured out to it to-morrow when it has assumed a more advanced form and position, and let it cease to be jealous of that into which it desires and is destined to ripen. On the other hand, what posture should capital assume toward

labor? The answer is that of trustee for it, as well as for itself. The bitterness of the existing struggle between the two will subside when capital shall feel that the law protects it in the possession and enjoyment of what it calls its own, for the good of itself and of those by whose aid it was acquired. The fate of families demonstrates that nothing is so fatal in every sense as the attempt to bring up the children of the rich as drones, and to entail upon them alone the wealth accumulated by their fathers. It is, moreover, to be exacted from capital that it shall abate its haughty contempt for labor; that it shall elevate and dignify it by participating in it, and by numbering its own sons and daughters in its ranks; and, finally, that it shall forestall the calamities threatened by the vastly superior force of the laboring masses by just and timely concessions, and by unforced solicitude for their welfare. Nor is it enough that they severally cultivate the right spirit toward each other; when they cannot agree they must learn to arbitrate their differences, and to forego the exercise of their extreme right to strike or to lock out as too costly and too indecisive. When, by the growth of moderation and of the spirit of compromise, the two powers have demonstrated that they can be trusted to deal with the interests of each other, society will ordain that there shall be three separate legislative bodies, one chosen by labor, one by capital,—to whom all questions affecting their respective interests shall, in the first instance, be submitted,—and the third, the ordinary legislature known to our constitutions, charged to enact into laws the compromises formulated by the other two; or, in case of their disagreement, to establish just measures for them, after having exhausted the usual legislative expedients for avoiding a deadlock.

As for those whom we have denominated assassins, while they are justly and almost universally odious, there is this to be said in their favor: they can often point to real grievances, and they are weak, and therefore able neither by the ballot nor by warfare in the customary modes to extort justice from their enemies. But though their reasoning is fallacious, there is a dangerous fascination in it for ignorance suffering under oppression, since it seems to promise at once justice and relief. And, in relation to their practical methods, though the existence of grievous error may be suspected, the coolest judgment may be so confounded by the apparent success attending some of their crimes,

as in the case of the dynamitards, that it is half persuaded to attribute to fear what may be due mainly to an awakened sense of justice in the hearts of their oppressors. Society, therefore, is compelled to discuss this, the most burning question of our time. In what ways shall weakness be permitted to make war upon superior strength? The question may relate to either offensive or defensive warfare. If attacked, doubtless weakness may employ any arms or any methods of warfare strictly necessary to self-defense. On the other hand, if the attacking party, it may use in open warfare in the field any arms whatever adapted to that purpose. So, no methods of conducting war could be interdicted to it so long as they were confined to the open destruction of opposing armaments, or to the crippling of the power or resources of its enemy. But the poisoning of wells has ever been forbidden, because to permit it in order to kill a belligerent would be to endanger alike friends and foes, innocent and guilty. Private assassination has never been permitted, even to the soldier, but only to destroy his enemy in battle. When such rules are observed, a battle is a trial in which there is fairness, if not equality. The peril is understood, and is of the same nature to each; the chances of favorable fortune not always unequal. This is honorable warfare, even where one party is numerically much superior to the other. How different the method of the assassin. There may be a so-called trial, but the accused is not present; he is not represented by counsel; there is no testimony in his defense; the accusing witness, the jury, the judge, and the executioner are one and the same person, and he is an enemy; the sentence is secret, and is executed in the dark. And the worst feature of the case is that the best men, innocent of wrong, may be the victims of the most despicable of mankind. Neither strength nor goodness is any protection from the assassin's knife. By the universal *consensus* of civilized men, therefore, it ought to be declared that his methods of warfare shall not be practiced. But if he will employ them, how prevent it? It is as impossible to refute an assassin as it is to refute a sneer; for it is less argument that leads him to slay than a murderous instinct, like that which inspires the viper. Like the viper, therefore, he must be stamped out. And yet refutation should not be omitted—refutation of the social theories on which his fatal methods are based, and of the perverted moral reasoning, the wicked casuistry, out of which they proceed. But

having exhausted this resource, let it be supplemented by proscription of the assassin as an enemy of the human race. It is doubtful even if there should not in this case be made an exception to the freedom of speech. What society permits to be advocated it pronounces to be at least a fair subject of debate, and not, under all circumstances, criminal and wicked. Civilization will be safe only when there are in the world no more such fanatics of crime.

A word, now, as to the perils which threaten us in connection with the marriage relation. The evil referred to is only one of a multitude that flow from the same source,—a general letting down of public sentiment in regard to the sanctity of marriage. While the Protestant view, that marriage is a civil contract and not a sacrament, has doubtless a basis of truth, it is not the whole truth. Marriage is a civil contract and a great deal more; it is the creation of a *status* the most sacred and the most important known to the law or to human life. Regarded merely as a contract, it is natural to conclude that it may be lightly dissolved; and, in fact, from precisely such a conclusion flows the disastrous flood of divorces that is overwhelming our Protestant communities. Far better than this would it be if the inflexible rule of the Roman Church were adopted and enforced. And one hazards little in predicting that, for the salvation of society, such must be the result, unless there shall be restored to the *status* of marriage something of the solemnity and sacredness imputed to it by that church. It is needless to multiply words. Our divorce and marriage laws must be revised, made uniform and more strict, and be rigidly enforced, or the disorganization of society now threatened by the increased loosening of the marital ties will become complete. So long as marriage is regarded as a mere civil contract, its higher purpose, the rearing of offspring, will be overlooked; its baser uses alone will be esteemed until, finally, whatever stands in the way of these will, at any cost, be removed. It must be admitted, however, that while the law, if amended and more strictly enforced, will do something, it cannot alone reach the inmost seat of the evil, in the perverted sentiment of the public in regard to marriage. Since this sentiment rests not so much upon errors in reasoning as upon corrupt inclinations, logic or legal interdiction can do little to correct it. To that, perhaps, religion alone is equal. And we cannot better close than by stating our conviction, that for the

saving of civilization from the destruction threatening it, as well from the prevalence of crime and social immorality as from the thickening dangers of industrial discontent and conflict, religion is the most effective instrumentality ; not the religion that builds temples from which it excludes the poor ; not the religion which shoots philosophical treatises from its pulpits over the heads of those who most need its consolations in the condition of social contempt and proscription in which they are held ; but the religion which reaches its hand to the plain men and women who form the bulk of our race and do its work ; which wins, instead of repelling them, and which shows itself the friend and minister of the toiling millions rather than of the millionaires who build its palaces ; the religion, in short, in which there is little of Augustine and Calvin, and much of Jesus.

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